



WHEN FAIR IS FOUL: PARADOX AND EQUIVOCATION IN *MACBETH*

Paradox: *A statement that seems to be contradictory but that might be true when considered from a particular perspective.*

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair.” –the Witches, 1.1.12

Equivocation: *A statement that lends itself to multiple interpretations, often with the deliberate intent to deceive.*

“Faith, here’s an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven.” –the Porter, 2.3.8-11

Paradoxes

- A. Identify the speaker and the addressee, and explain as much as you can about the context of the situation.
- B. Explain the specific terms in the quotation that make it a paradox.
- C. Explain the hidden truth to be found in the paradox.

1. “So foul and fair a day I have not seen.” –1.3.39
2. “Lesser than Macbeth and greater.” –1.3.68
3. “Not so happy, yet much happier.” –1.3.69
4. “This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good.” –1.3.143-144
5. “And nothing is but what is not.” –1.3.155

Equivocations

- A. Identify the speaker and the addressee, and explain as much as you can about the context of the situation.
- B. Explain the specific terms in the quotation that make it an equivocation.
- C. Explain the deceptive truth that is to be found in the equivocation.

6. “All our service, / In every point twice done and then done double” –1.6.18-19
7. “Had I but died an hour before this chance, / I had lived a blessed time” –2.3.107-108
8. “And though I could / With barefaced power sweep him from my sight / And bid my will avouch it, yet I must not, / For certain friends that are both his and mine, / Whose loves I may not drop, but wail his fall / Who I myself struck down.” –3.1.134-139
9. “Thou canst not say I did it” –3.4.61